

CAREER FOCUS

Thrift Savings Plan:

A good way to invest in your future!

BY MASTER SGT.
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TEAM KIRTLAND
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QI've heard of the Thrift Savings Plan, but what exactly is the TSP?

A Created by the Federal Employees' Retirement System Act of 1986, TSP is a tax-deferred savings option that lowers the taxable income for participants.

The savings plan, similar to 401k plans offered by many private employers, is separate from the military retirement system, which is based on years of service and rank. Administered by the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, TSP was available only to civilian employees until October 2001, when the program was extended to active- and reserve-component service members, including the Coast Guard.

"You're never too young or too old to start a savings account in TSP," said Gary Amelio, executive director of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, and chief executive and managing fiduciary of TSP for federal employees. "The tax deferral benefits are excellent and compounded earnings are simply a phenomenal way to increase your wealth."

The program allows service members to contribute up to nine percent of their base pay each month and up to 100 percent of incentive pay and special pay, including bonus and combat pay, but total contributions from taxable pay may not exceed the Internal Revenue Service limit of \$13,000 for 2004.

Q What are the immediate benefits of making tax-deferred contributions to the TSP?

A Tax-deferred contributions are "before-tax" contributions. In other words, the money you contribute is taken out of your pay before federal and, in almost all cases, state income taxes are withheld. Therefore, the amount used to calculate your taxes is smaller, so you pay less in taxes now.

Deposits to a regular savings account do not provide such an advantage.

Q What are the long-term benefits of tax-deferred contributions?

A By participating in the TSP, you defer (that is, postpone) paying federal taxes on the money you contribute until you withdraw the funds from your TSP account.

In addition, over the years, the money in your account will accrue earnings. These earnings are also tax-deferred.

This means that you do not pay income taxes on your TSP account contributions and earnings until you receive the money—usually after you retire (when your tax bracket may be lower).

With assets totaling more than \$110 billion, TSP maintains retirement savings accounts for more than three million participants including federal civilian employees in all branches of government, U.S. Postal Service employees and members of the seven uniformed services.

"As members of the armed services



Master Sgt. David Halvorson

become more familiar with TSP, the more they like it," said Mr. Amelio. "They find that it's a wonderful savings program, easy to participate in, and doesn't cost them anything."

"The more they talk to their colleagues in the armed forces about it, they become more comfortable about the plan, and they like it more and more. That's why the participation is going up."

When service members leave active duty, they have several options. They can leave their money in TSP, allowing it to continue to grow, take a partial or full withdrawal, roll the money into another plan or an Individual Retirement Account, or purchase an annuity. They also could choose to make periodic distributions to themselves, Mr. Amelio said.

Looking for an opportunity to invest in your future? Now is a good time for service members to start paying themselves.

The TSP open season started April 15 and runs until June 30. This is the time service members can start or change their contributions to their TSP account.

There's a great deal more information on the Thrift Savings Plan Web site, so logon today at www.tsp.gov to see how the TSP can help prepare you for those golden years.



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Nucleus is on the Web
at www.kirtland.af.mil

E-mail articles only
to 377ABW.NUCLEUS
@kirtland.af.mil

Editorial: 846-4235.

Submission deadline
9 a.m. the Friday before
publication. Deadlines
change for holidays.

Advertising deadlines
Classified:
Tuesday, noon, 892-9400,
observerclass@attglobal.net

Display:
Friday, 5 p.m., 892-9400,
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Command Chief's Choice



Tech. Sgt. Michelle Makowski

Tech. Sgt. Michelle Makowski is a member of the 150th Medical Squadron.

Some of her duties include maintaining and processing medical flight records, managing and processing physical exams, managing waivers and world wide duty evaluations and coordinating with the base hospital and outside agencies for exams.

What do you like best about this assignment?

Facilities are kept up nicely on the base. I like the scenic view along the running path. There seems to be a balanced focus on health and wellness as seen with all the renovations, running paths and different fitness classes available. The loca-

tion of the base, on the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, is ideal for members that enjoy outdoor activities.

What are your hobbies?

I enjoy hiking, biking, camping with family and friends. I also enjoy some quiet time with a captivating book and a good cup of mocha coffee.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I'll have finished my degree in public relations, and hopefully have become a commissioned officer. I will be 10 years closer to retirement and lots of travel under my belt.

What is your main goal in life?

Ultimately my main goal is to lead a healthy and fulfilling life; one where I can look back with no regrets and have a feeling of accomplishment and joy.

FORUM

kirtlandcc.forum@kirtland.af.mil, 846-4240

Exercise, temporary duty cause delay

I just came out of the flight surgeon's office and waited for an hour and a half for sick call. There still is no doctor there. They told me they have three doctors, one was on temporary duty, one was flying and one was in an exercise.

I did not have time to stick around. What I did was call the patient advocate and asked what I can do, and she said I could file a formal complaint.

When I asked who reviews that, she said, "well the flight medicine office does," well that's not really a check and a balance, so I'm wondering what we can do about this? Poor planning on their part means a lack of healthcare on my part.

Then the patient advocate, the advocate started to argue with me, so I said thank you and then hung up. Please don't defend these people, please give me resolution to this, if you're just going to defend them, then please do not answer my question.

I want to know what the resolution is, not just say, "Well they are over-worked and undermanned" because we all are. The whole Air Force is.

We apologize for the delay in seeing you during sick call on the day in question. We normally have two doctors seeing patients during normal clinic hours. As you noted above, we did have one flight surgeon on temporary duty, one flying, and one in the clinic who then responded appropriately to a mishap call on the crash phone.

As part of TEAM KIRTLAND's cadre of responders, flight medicine is required to send two technicians and one flight surgeon to the scene for each mishap event. As you can imagine, most of the time, we don't know when these events will occur.

Still, as our capacity to see patients dropped that day, we triaged all patients to ensure none needed emergency care. We then gave others the option to wait to be seen or to be seen the following morning during sick call. Once the flight surgeon returned from all emergency



COL. HENRY L. ANDREWS, JR.
377th Air Base Wing commander

response activities, he saw all the patients who were still in the clinic.

Of note, AEF-9 is right around the corner (beginning June 1, for many who will deploy). This is one of our two AEF "buckets" (the other being AEF-5). As a result, our medical group team will have a number of its providers deployed in harm's way to defend America.

This will undoubtedly result in more instances of people waiting longer at sick call or having to be a bit more flexible in seeking appointment times.

Destroying trees?

Over the weekend I watched contractors destroy a couple of trees just east of the Wyoming Gate, in that new housing area.

Anyhow, with all of the dead trees on base it just seems like a big waste. They bulldozed a couple of live and healthy trees. Please say something to the contractors.

We appreciate your concern for our environment. As you know, changes are taking place in the housing areas of Kirtland AFB. A number of new homes are currently under construction, with completion of the entire project set for late 2006. To accommodate the new design of the housing area, Kirtland Family

Housing identified and retained as many of the existing trees as possible.

In fact, Kirtland Family Housing is required to protect in place all healthy existing trees that were identified to remain. Unfortunately, some healthy trees were removed because of conflicts with the location of new houses, infrastructure and streets.

As cuts and fills to attain the proper grading of the site were made, the integrity of other trees was jeopardized and they were subsequently removed for safety reasons.

Twenty of the large trees which were removed will be replaced with large oak specimen trees that will be 16-18 feet tall with an 8-9 foot spread and 4-5 inch wide trunk. In addition, there will be six box oak trees with a 3-inch trunk and 8-9 foot spread.

Kirtland Family Housing will fully landscape the new housing areas with a wide assortment of evergreen trees, deciduous trees, shrubs, perennials and vines. Landscaping will take into consideration water conservation and will include drought resistant ground cover and rock mulch. It's going to be a great place to live.

Wasting water

I am disgusted! Everyday you hear about the drought conditions in New Mexico. Instead of advocating water conservation, base housing seems to advocate water waste.

The yards that have the lush green grass are mostly because of water waste. Those people water way over the allowed amount and at all hours of the day and night.

They don't care in Zia Park, because they don't have to pay for the water separately. I have seen people water for hours. They water their yards, driveways, houses, sidewalks and streets.

This isn't only residents. I have seen housing watering the yards of empty houses during the hottest hours of the day.

Now that it is spring, I see people planting grass all over Zia. Why aren't we requiring more water friendly landscaping? Why aren't the watering restrictions enforced?

To ensure sufficient water supply in years to come, we must act in a conservative manner now. There are a number of ways each individual can practice water conservation.

One of the most significant uses of water is in landscaped areas. TEAM KIRTLAND makes every effort to comply with base and city of Albuquerque watering guidelines.

Occupants of odd-numbered houses may water on odd-numbered days and even numbered houses on even numbered days 6 p.m.-10 a.m.

If you are establishing a new yard, of course, you will need to water more frequently and we ask that you contact the Kirtland Family Housing Office, 232-2049, for guidance.

Of note, Kirtland Family Housing is restoring many of the yards in the Zia Park and Maxwell housing areas and will be watering outside the times prescribed for established yards. That said, Kirtland Family Housing will issue a notice of advisement to those individuals watering established lawns outside the prescribed times.

Forum

We want your suggestions and comments concerning Kirtland AFB.

However, may we also suggest giving base agencies or the chain of command the chance to resolve your concern before calling Forum.

If you decide the Forum is the right answer, we don't print callers' names.

Customer service

Chapel, 846-5691

CE Help Desk, 846-8222

Commissary, 846-9586

Computer help, 846-5926

Energy wasting, 846-4633

Exchange Service, 266-9887

Family Services, 846-0741

Finance, 846-8045, 846-6639

Law Enforcement, 846-7926

Legal Services, 846-4217

Medical Clinic, 846-3406

Services Squadron, 846-1828

Write:

377 ABW/CC Forum

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